

CONTRIBUTION OF PUNISHMENT AS A MANAGERIAL STRATEGY IN NIGERIAN ORGANISATIONS

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Abstract

An organisation consists of a group of employees, and the success of the organisation is directly related to the success of that group of employees. One of the key factors in determining the success of those employees is the relationship that they have with the employer. This paper examines the role of punishment in management practices in organisations. This also made attempt to examine the important behavioural and social issues associated with the use of punishment in organisations. This paper made use of content analysis. The paper recommends that managers should punish only undesirable behaviours, give reprimands as soon as possible, tell employees exactly what kind of work behaviours are undesirable and their associated consequences, administer punishment in private and punishment should have information value and employee's value.

Introduction

Organisations must be concerned with eliminating undesirable behaviours if the set out objectives such as profitability, productivity, market share, quality, growth, survival, customer satisfaction, employee welfare, corporate social responsibility, innovation, research and development, cost minimisation and public image or reputation is going to be realised. The need to use punishment may be present in organisations when the

Managers are often faced with problem behaviours in the work setting that must be solved to prevent additional negative consequences. Majority of employee behaviour is positive and directed toward the accomplishment of

meaningful goals. Managing employee bad behaviour requires an active posture in that managers are responsible for identifying, solving and correcting problems. Managers do not like to talk about punishment because it implies that:

- 1) they have hired the wrong employees,
- 2) the work environment they help create is less than ideal, and
- 3) they and their organisations treat their employees badly. In spite of this concern, punishment is everyday occurrence in organisations. The connotation of punishment makes people uncomfortable.

Definitions of Punishment

Punishment is defined as presenting an uncomfortable or unwanted consequence for a particular

behavioural response (Deconinck, 2003). Managers punish by application or punish by removal.

Exhibit 1: Rewards, Reinforcement, and Punishment

	Desirable	Undesirable
Applied	Positive reinforcement (behaviour increases) I	Punishment (behaviour decreases) III
Withdrawn	Punishment (behaviour decreases) II	Negative reinforcement (behaviour increases) IV

Source: Inancevich, J. M.; Konopaske, R. and Matterson, M. T. (2008). *Organisational Behaviour and Management*. New York: McGraw Hill/Irvin p. 174

The dilemma of using punishment as displayed in cells II and III in Exhibit 1.

Undesirable or punishment consequences will decrease the strength of a response and decrease its probability of being repeated. Punishment means an unpleasant event follows a behaviour and decreases its frequency (Slocum & Hellriegel, 2007). A punishment may include a specific antecedent that cues the employee that a consequence (punisher) will follow a specific behaviour. Organisations typically use several types of unpleasant events to punish individuals (Sunstem, 2003). Material consequences for failure to perform adequately include a cut in pay, a disciplinary suspension without pay, a demotion, or a transfer to a dead-end job. The final punishment is the firing an employee for failure to perform. In general, organisations reserve the use of unpleasant material events for cases of serious behaviour problems.

Interpersonal punishers are used extensively which may include a manager's oral reprimand of an employee for unacceptable behaviour and nonverbal punishers such as frowns, grunts, and aggressive body language. Certain tasks themselves can be unpleasant. The fatigue that follows hard physical labour can be considered a punisher, as can harsh or dirty working

conditions. For examples, a senior police officer to serve as traffic warden. Though there is no hard and fast rule here because in some fields and to some fields and to some employees, harsh and dirty working conditions may be considered as just something that goes into the job.

The list of potential employee misbehaviours faced by managers that may call for punishment will include the following: sexual harassment, arson, blackmail, bribery, bullying, cheating, fraud, espionage, theft, threats, withholding information, sabotage, lying, misinformation, incivility, kickbacks, dishonesty, discrimination, substance abuse, privacy violation, revenge, spying on co-workers, embezzlement, restriction of output, goldbricking, vandalism etc. Punishment may be inflicted as a result of white collar crime that is crime committed by a person of respectability and high social status in the course of his occupation (Sutherland, 1940). Coleman (1987) proposed that white-collar crimes involve illegal acts, the identification of a beneficiary of the acts, and the social status of the actors (criminal). He further differentiated between occupational crime, or crimes to benefit the criminal conducted with organisational support, and organisational crime, which is

conducted with the support of an organisation.

The dictionary definition of punishment is "to impose a penalty on a criminal or wrongdoer for an offence". No manager wants to view his employees as criminal or himself as their judge, jury and executioner. The definition does not create a positive view of human nature. From a practical standpoint, punishment is much more complex than positive reinforcement and predicting its effects is much more difficult. To understand punishment, one must focus on behaviour and its consequences. Punishment always weakens behaviour and are subjective and emotion laden. What one person perceives as punishment may turn out to be positive or negative reinforcement because of its unpleasant consequences.

The standard or central case of punishment is defined in terms of five elements:

- i. It must involve pains or other consequences normally considered unpleasant;
- ii. It must be for an offence against legal rules;
- iii. It must be of an actual or supposed offender for his offence.
- iv. It must be intentionally administered by human being as other than the offender; and
- v. It must be imposed and administered by an authority constituted by a legal system against which the offence is committed.

Punishment is the authoritative imposition of an undesirable or unpleasant outcome upon a group or individual in response to a particular action or behaviour that is deemed unacceptable or threatening to some

norm (Hugo, 2010; McAnany, 2010). The unpleasant imposition may include a fine, penalty or confinement or the removal or denial of something pleasant or desirable.

Punishments differ in their degree of severity and may include sanctions such as reprimands, deprivations of privileges or liberty fines, incarcerations, ostracism, the infliction of pain, amputation and the death penalty. Corporal punishment refers to punishments in which physical pain is intended to be inflicted upon the transgressor. Punishments may be judged as fair or unfair in terms of their degree of reciprocity and proportionality (Hugo, 2010). Punishment can be an integral part of socialisation and punishing unwanted behaviour is often part of a system of pedagogy or behaviour modification which also includes rewards.

Conditions commonly considered necessary property to describe as actions as punishment are that:

1. It is imposed by an authority;
2. It involves some loss to the supposed offender;
3. It is in response to an offence and
4. the person to whom the loss is imposed should be deemed at least somewhat responsible for the offence.

The following questions were raised to guide the conduct of this research:

1. Why is punishment necessary in organisations?
2. What are the principles guiding punishment?
3. What are the negative effects of punishment?
4. What are the positive effects of punishment in an organisation?

The Principles of Punishment

Three principles of punishment are:

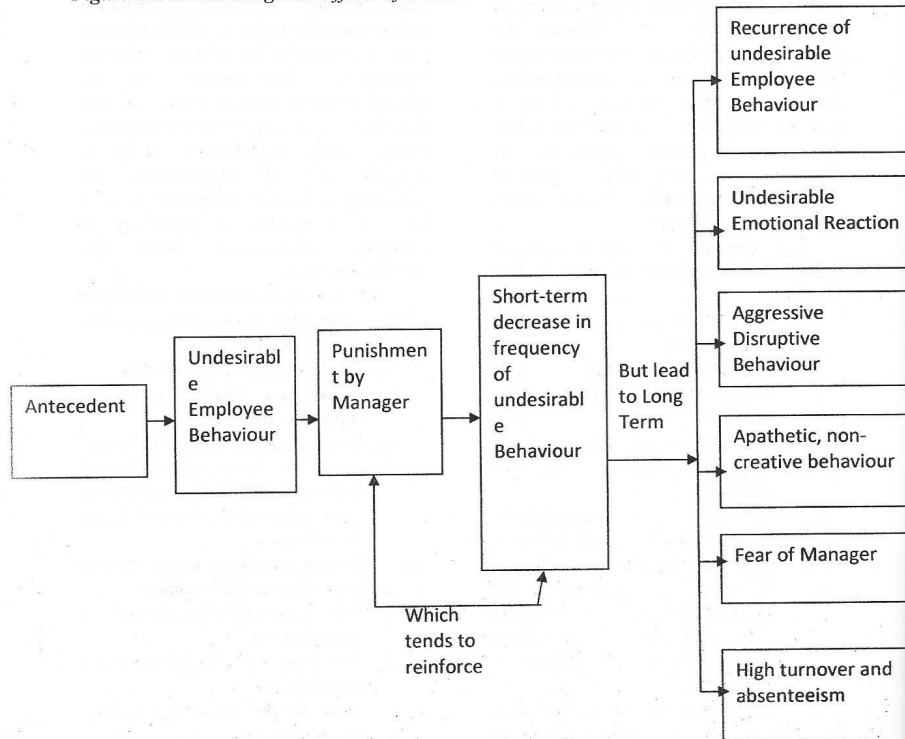
- 1) a punisher should be directly linked to the undesirable behaviour (principle of contingent punishment);
- 2) the punishment should be administered immediately (principle of immediate punishment); and

- 3) the greater the size of the punisher the stronger will be the effect on the undesirable behaviour (principle of punishment size).

Negative Effects of Punishment

Punishment may stop undesirable employee behaviour. However, the potential negative consequences may be greater than the original undesirable behaviour.

Figure 2: Potential Negative Effects of Punishment



Source: Sloan, J. W. and Hellriegel D. (2007). *Fundamentals of Organisational Behaviour*. USA. Thompson, South Westemp. 375.

Punishment may cause undesirable emotional reactions. An employee who has been reprimanded for coming late to work just once may react with anger toward the Manager and the organisation. Such reactions may lead to behaviour detrimental to the organisation, e.g. sabotage. Punishment frequently leads only to short-term suppression of the undesirable behaviour, rather to its elimination. Thus, suppression of an undesirable behaviour over a long period of time usually requires continued, and perhaps, increasingly severe punishment. Another problem is that control of the undesirable behaviour becomes contingent on the manager's presence when the manager isn't around; the undesirable employee's behaviour is likely to recur.

In addition, the punished individual may try to avoid or escape the situation through high absenteeism or quitting. High absenteeism is a form of avoidance that is likely to occur when punishment is used frequently. Quitting is the employee's final form to have high rates of employee turnover.

Punishment suppresses employee initiative and flexibility. Reacting to punishment, many an employee has said, "I'm going to do just what I'm told and nothing more." Such attitude is undesirable because organisations depend on the personal initiative and creativity that individual employees bring to their jobs. Overusing punishment produces apathetic employees who are not an asset to an organisation but a liability. Sustained punishment can also lead to low esteem. Low self-esteem, in turn, undermines the employee's self confidence, which is necessarily for performing most jobs.

Punishment produces a conditional fear of management. That is, employees develop a general fear of punishment-oriented managers. Such managers become an environmental cue, indicating to employee the probability that an aversive event will occur. So if operations require frequent, normal, and positive interaction between employee and manager, such a situation can quickly become intolerable. Responses to fear, such as "hiding" or reluctance to communicate with a Manager, may well hinder employee performance.

A manager may rely on punishment because it often produces fast results in the short-run. In essence, the manager is reinforced for using punishment because the approach produces an immediate change in an employee's behaviour. That may cause the manager to ignore punishment's long-term detrimental effects, which can be cumulative.

Positive Effects of Punishment in Organisation

Effective use of punishment does have an appropriate place in management. Much of our behaviour is learned under the condition created by naturally occurring punishers. Mother Nature punishes us quickly if we stay too long in the sun or if we try to swim after a big meal. Thus, our natural environment teaches us new behaviour which we learn without permanent emotional damage. This logic extends to organisations which also have many naturally occurring punishers, examples which include machinery of all kinds, customers, deadlines etc. Employees can readily learn new behaviours from unpleasant encounters with these naturally occurring punishers. The most common form of punishment in

organisations is the oral reprimand. It is intended to diminish or stop undesirable employee behaviour. An old rule of thumb is "praise in public, punish in private." Private punishment establishes a different type of contingency of reinforcement than public punishment. In general, a private reprimand can be constructive and informative. A public reprimand is likely to have negative effects because the person has been embarrassed in front of his/her peers.

Oral reprimands should never be given about behaviour in general and especially never about a so-called bad attitude. An effective reprimand pinpoints and specifically describes the undesirable behaviour to be avoided in the future. It focuses on the target behaviour and avoids threatening the employee's self image. The effective reprimand punishes specific undesirable behaviour, not in person; behaviour is easier to change than the person.

Punishment (by definition) trains a person in what not to do, not in what to do. Hence, a manager must specify an alternative behaviour to the employee. When the employee performs the desired alternative behaviour, the Manager must then reinforce that behaviour positively.

Finally, managers should strike an appropriate balance between the use of pleasant and unpleasant events. The absolute number of unpleasant events isn't important, but the ratio of pleasant to unpleasant events is.

In order to be an effective manager, positive reinforcement should dominate and be used frequently, while deserved punishment be used occasionally. Given these problems, opponents suggest alternatives to punishment. These alternatives and a description of each are shown in Table below:

<i>Alternative</i>	<i>Description</i>
Extinction	Since much desirable employee behaviour is intended to gain co-worker attention and to show off, supervisors and co-workers should ignore it. In this way, they remove the positive consequences of attention and eventually the employee ceases the unruly behaviour.
Re-engineer the work Environment so undesirable behaviour cannot occur.	If employees waste time in the break area, install a window so that the supervisor can easily observe employee activity in the area.
Reward behaviour which is physically incompatible with undesirable behaviour.	Rather than discipline employees for untidy work areas, reward them for cleaning their workplaces.
Be patient and allow time for undesirable behaviour to disappear.	When a manager states 'It's ok to make a few mistakes because we learn from them' we are observing this amiable philosophy.

Use of Punishment in the Workplace

Why is punishment so common or necessary in organisations?

Punishment is used in the workplace because of the following fundamental reasons:

Control in organisations is often achieved through liberal use of punishment. Indeed, many cyclical work features of organisations can be viewed as unpleasant consequences waiting to happen. Budgets, production quotas, deadlines, performance goals and performance reviews, all occur regularly in the course of work. Successful performance removes the veiled threat in these requirements. Often employees define successful job performance in terms of escaping punishment consequences. See **Famolu's download**.

The behavioural psychologists said that punishment can be used to shape behaviour. Skinner (1938), working with pigeons, found out that following a response with an aversive stimulus could be effective in eliminating the behaviour. So, applying this to human behaviour, he found that giving some form of punishment following an unwanted response would help to eliminate that behaviour.

However, Skinner also found that the results of the punishment were relatively short-lived, and hence punishment only has a temporary effect on deterring unwanted behaviour rather than eliminating it totally. He also found that punishment has a more permanent effect if the desirable behaviours are rewarded at the same time as punishing the undesirable behaviours. In a work setting, for example, this would suggest that punishing employee who regularly turns up late for work will be more

effective if that employee is also rewarded when he/she turns up for a work on time.

Reasons Why Punishment Often Fails.

Collins (1995) suggests a number of reasons that punishment often fails to achieve the goals required. These include:

1. It hurts. In the work situation the hurt is not physical pain (like it could be when smacking a child as a punishment) rather it is likely to be the emotional/mental pain felt as a result of the humiliation of being disciplined.
2. Those who are punished often drop out of the situation. In a work situation this could mean that the employee decides to resign. However, it could also mean that the employee withdraws from group activities and works alone, which could be to detriment of successful working relationships.
3. Punishment can create anger and hostility. If this is not addressed, the working relationships can become much damaged over time.
4. Punishment brings with it the reward of getting attention. If an employee views punishment in this way it will not be successful.

Regardless of the difficulties associated with punishment. It is used along with rewards, to regulate behaviour within organisation (Salmon 2000).

Possible Reasons for Punishment

There are many possible reasons that might be given to justify or explain why someone ought to be punished. They are:

1. Deterrence (prevention)

Punishment is justified in that it is a measure to prevent people

from committing an offence, deterring previous offenders from re-offending and preventing those who may be contemplating an offence they have not committed from actually committing it.

2. Rehabilitation

Some punishment includes work to reform and rehabilitate the offender so that they will not commit the offence again. The goal here is to change the offender's attitude to what they have done, and make them come to see that their behaviour was wrong.

3. Incapacitation and Societal Protection

This refers to the offender's ability to commit further offence again.

4. Retribution Punishment.

This has been justified as a measure of redistributive justice in which the goal is to try to rebalance any unjust advantage gained by ensuring that the offender also suffers a loss while the offended victim gained back what was lost. Societies administered punishment so as to diminish the perceived need for retaliatory street justice, blood feud and vigilantism.

5. Restoration.

Offender righting the wrong or restitution e.g. community service or compensation orders.

6. Education and Denunciation

Punishment educates people regarding what is not acceptable behaviour. Punishment can be explained by positive Prevention theory to use the criminal justice system to teach people what the

social norms for what is correct are, and act as reinforcement. Punishment can serve as a means for society to publicly express denunciation of an action as being criminal. Punishment serves the dual function of preventing vigilante justice by acknowledging public anger, while concurrently determining future criminal activity by stigmatising the offender. This is sometimes called "Expressive Theory of denunciation"

7. Unified theory

The unified theory of punishment brings together multiple penal purposes - such as retribution, deterrence and rehabilitation in a single, coherent framework. Unified theorists argue that they work together as part of some wider goal as the protection of right.

The Forms of Punishment

The different forms of punishment when found guilty according to the law of the land and rules and regulations of an organisation may include oral reprimand, imprisonment, sent on probation, slammed with a fine and restitution, sentenced to community service, demotion and the severest-Capital punishment (for serious crime).

Oral Reprimand

Oral reprimand pin points and specifically describes the undesirable behaviour to be avoided in the future. It focuses on the target behaviour and avoids threatening the employee's self-image. The effective reprimand punishes specific undesirable behaviour, not the person. Behaviour is easier to change than the person.

Imprisonment or Incarceration

Imprisonment or incarceration is when a person is put in jail as a lawful punishment. Retribution that is, the act of correcting a person for his misconduct, is the main purpose of imprisonment. Besides this, it also serves other purposes like deterrence, incapacitation and rehabilitation.

Probation

Probation is most often used in lieu of imprisonment. A person is sentenced to probation for misdemeanours as well as a felony of a lesser degree. The person on probation is supposed to abide by the probation condition set by the court which may include restriction from possessing weapons or moving out of the area of jurisdiction. The probation officer is assigned the task to ensure that the person follows these rules properly.

Fine and Restitutions

Fine and restitution involve paying a particular sum of money. There is a difference between the two. Fine is supposed to be paid by the convict to the government, while restitution is supposed to be paid by the convict as a compensation to the affected party. This form of punishment is generally given when the judge is convinced that the convict is not a threat to the society. In case of a fine, it can either be given individually or along with a specific period of imprisonment. If required, the court can also confiscate the property of the convict, especially when the crime is serious and the person convicted is in no position of paying the fine.

Community Service

Community service is a form of alternative sentencing which requires the convict to work for the society, either partly or entirely, in lieu of the sanction or fine imposed on him. Generally, a person is sentenced to community

service for varying degrees of misdemeanours, or for a non violent felony.

Demotion

Demotion is a form of downgrading an individual from a superior or higher position to a lower cadre as a way of teaching the individual to behave well or perform as expected. Demotion usually result from fallacy of "Peter's Principle" that is one being promoted above level of ones competence.

Capital Punishment

Capital punishment, also referred to as the death penalty. Capital punishment is by far the most severe form of punishment. A person may be sentenced to death for crimes like murder, homicide, rape etc. depending on the provision of the law of the land. The most important objectives of capital punishment are deterrence, that is conveying a message that such acts will not be tolerated in the society and incapacitation, that is making sure that the person doesn't repeat such heinous action.

Basically, punishment is given to an individual to make him repent, ensure justice to the victim and set an example for the rest of the society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Positive reinforcement is more effective than punishment over the long run, but effectively used punishment does have an appropriate place in management. In essence, the manager is reinforced for using punishment because the approach produces an immediate change in an employee's behaviour. Managers should endeavour to ignore long term detrimental effects of punishment which can be cumulative. The most common form of punishment in an organisations is the oral reprimand

which is intended to diminish or stop an undesirable employee behaviour. An old rule of thumb is 'Praise in public; punish in private'

While punishment can suppress behaviour if used effectively. It is a controversial method of behaviour modification in organisation. It should be employed only after careful and objective consideration of all the relevant aspects of the situation. There will be sometimes when there is need to threaten or administer unpleasant consequences to stop employee's undesirable behaviour. Sometimes, it is the best to combine punishment with positive reinforcement. Some suggestions for using punishment are as follows:

1. Punish only undesirable behaviour: Undesirable behaviours must be prevented from becoming bad employee habits. Take corrective action before employees become accustomed to working incorrectly. You will gain nothing by waiting and hoping that employees will correct their own behaviours. Losing patience after observing numerous infractions is just as bad since your punishment will be out of proportion to the infractions in most cases. Punishment should only be meted out or given when employees show frequent undesirable behaviour. Otherwise, employees may come to view the boss as negative and tyrannical.
2. Punishment must be intense and immediate. There should be no mistake about the undesirable behaviour. The punisher should be of sufficient intensity to weaken the behaviour. Incremental disciplinary programmes are not as effective as intense and immediate punishment because employee can build up resistance to the punisher. Give reprimands or disciplinary actions as

soon as possible: Punishment should be given as soon as possible after the undesirable behaviour occurs.

3. Be clear and sure about what constitutes behaviour that is considered undesirable: Employees should be adequately and exactly informed what kind of work behaviours are undesirable and make any disciplinary action or reprimand match the behaviour.

4. Administer punishment in private: Employees are not usually happy when they are demeaned in front of one's subordinates. Boss that reprimand in front of others is usually hated by employees and this could lead to resentments that may have nothing with an employee's infractions.

5. Combine punishment and positive reinforcement: When an employee is reprimanded, be sure to also say or credit him/her with what he/she is doing right and state what reward he/she might be eligible for.

6. Punishment must be equitable across people and infractions. Match the punishment to the infraction. Also, senior employees should not be exempted from discipline. Partiality and favouritism from reprimands should not be shown even to hard to replace employees (talented or experts that are in short supply). In short, punishment must not discriminate.

7. Punishment must have information value. After the reprimand has been administered, the employee should (i) receive an explanation as to why the behaviour is undesirable. (ii) be told how to correct the behaviour and (iii) be told the consequences of further infractions.

8. Reaffirmation of the employee's value to the organisation. After corrective action has been taken, the employee's value to the organisation must be reaffirmed. Leave the self-esteem of the

employee intact. An employee should remember the behaviour he must correct instead of how he was mistreated. This lessens the degree of emotional reaction to the punishment.

9. There should be no non contingent rewards. Punishment should not be followed by non-contingent rewards. This means that the manager or a supervisor should not invite an employee to lunch to alleviate his guilt about reprimanding the employee for being a perpetual late comer to work or being slow to completing a project.

Finally, managers should strike an appropriate balance between the use of pleasant and unpleasant events. Positive management procedures should dominate in a well-run organisation

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